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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the priority of social and political issues in America's Asian Indian subcommunity and, secondarily, proposes content analysis for investigations of Asian American sub-cultures. The data sources and methodology are described first: letters to the editor published between September 1, 1983 and June 30, 1984, were selected from two newspapers, "India Abroad" (of New York City) and "India-West" (of San Francisco). One hundred thirty-two letters were identified as relevant to the survey; these are content analyzed under the following themes: (1) communal identity; (2) politicization and participation; (3) Americanization; (4) concern for women and children; (5) discrimination and racism; (6) service delivery by Indian organizations; (7) sub-community pluralism (the largest category); and (8) miscellaneous issues (including education and culture). Two tables are included--one that shows the thematic concern of anonymous letters, and another that profiles the known letter writers by sex (most were male) and by organizational affiliation. (KH)

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CONCERNS OF ASIAN INDIANS: AN EXPLORATORY
THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS OF
UNOBTRUSIVE DOCUMENTARY DATA FOR ASIAN
AMERICAN RESEARCH.

by

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INTRODUCTION

The research reported in this paper is a study in the utilization of content analysis methodology.¹ Several Asian American studies have emphasized upon survey data collection. The Researchers with limited access to resources may find it difficult to carry out survey research. Such researchers would find content analysis as an economical way of data collection. It seems possible to apply content analytic methods to virtually any form of communication including books, magazines, poems, newspapers, songs, paintings, speeches, letters, laws, television programs, and other documents such as diaries.²

The purpose of this research is to answer a basic question. "What are the priority of issues in the Asian Indian community in the United States?" A study of this nature could be carried out by utilizing survey research technique. But content analytic research could also be attempted to answer the similar question.³ This research will seek to analyze the priority of issues in the Asian Indian community by content analyzing this subcommunity's English language press.⁴ The following section will describe the specific procedures that were utilized in carrying out the data collection and analyses. This is an exploratory study. It does not seek to test any specific hypotheses about the Asian Indian community. But a review of literature on Asian Indian community suggests the feasibility of carrying out hypothesis--testing research with content analysis data.⁵

It is not the purpose of this paper to suggest that content analysis could be a substitute for survey research in Asian American communities. It merely explains content analysis as another alternative available to Asian American researchers interested in systematic investigation of social phenomena in Asian American sub-cultures.

II

DATA SOURCES

Two major weekly English language newspapers serve the Asian Indian community in the U.S.--Indian Abroad (New York) and India-West (San Francisco Bay Area). These two newspapers began publications in the late sixties following the large scale immigration of Asian Indian professionals to the USA and serve them and their families.⁶ These papers regularly publish a variety of features including newsitems, editorials, letters to the editor, special articles, questions and answers on immigration, community calendar of events, listing of radio/television programs, sports news, classified advertisements, book reviews, opinion of columnists, announcements of conferences, and political advertisements of Asian Indian political action committees.⁷ Several of these items could be utilized as documentary sources for content analysis.

The "letters to the editor" published in both India Abroad and India-West was selected for content analysis. All letters published in these papers between September 1, 1983 and June 30, 1984 (ten months) were identified.⁸ Of these letters only those letters that dealt with Asian Indian community in the United States were selected for content analysis. Letters dealing with international affairs, Indian politics, Srilanka and Pakistan were excluded. This reduced the total number of letters to 132. These 132 letters constituted a purposive sample.

Content analytic researchers draw a distinction between "manifest content" and "latent content."⁹ In this research we have utilized manifest content-- which is the visible, surface content or a communication which closely approximates it has the advantage of ease and reliability in coding. The coding of the letters were carried out by identifying their thematic contents,

gender of the letter writer and their organizational affiliations, if any. Such coding could have been expanded to include religion of the letter writer, linguistic and regional origins of the letter writers. Some of their letter writers indicated their academic degrees such as "Ph.D.", "MD", "DR". A few of these letter writers were repeat users of the "letters to the editor" section of the newspaper. In a few cases these repeat users rebutted the views points of other letter writers. In some cases the original letter writers who had raised an issue wrote again in response to the critics.

The length of the letters also varied from about 2 column inches to 3 columns. thus the number of letters appearing in a specific issue of the newspaper varied from about four letters to ten rather short letters in some cases. For the purpose of this project none of these elements were coded for the purpose of analyses.

III

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The objective of this research is to identify the priority of issues in the Asian Indian community in the United States. An analysis of the thematic contents of the letter to the editors published in two widely circulated Asian Indian newspapers may provide some answer to this question. It is important to emphasize that the letter writers do not constitute a representative samples of the Asian Indian community. Even the published letter may not constitute a representative samples of all the letters that are received by the editors of these two newspapers. Any analyses presented in this paper keep these limitations of the data base in perspective.

The table No. 1 provides a quantitative distribution of the thematic contents of the 132 letters that was considered for content analysis. In general, these categories and their relative weightage may be somewhat indicative of the priority of issues in the Asian Indian community in the United States. Since the 8 categories indicated in table No. 1 need elaboration, a brief description of the type of letters that were included in each of these categories are indicated as follows. The categories proposed may not be mutually exclusive with possibility of an overlap between some categories. The miscellaneous category proposed here may have included some items that deserve closer analysis.

Table No. 1

MAJOR THEMES IN
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR RELATING
TO ASIAN INDIANS IN U.S.

Themes	Frequency	Percentage
1. <u>COMMUNAL IDENTITY</u>	24	18%
2. <u>POLITICIZATION AND PARTICIPATION</u>	13	9%
3. <u>AMERICANIZATION</u>	6	4%
4. <u>CONCERN FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN</u>	16	12%
5. <u>DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM</u>	5	3%
6. <u>SERVICE DELIVERY BY INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS</u>	31	23%
7. <u>SUB-COMMUNITY PLURALISM</u>	32	24%
8. <u>MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES</u>	5	3%
TOTAL	132	96%

COMMUNAL IDENTITY AND PRIDE

This category included a substantial number of letters. These letters broadly fell in two. It included letters expressing concerns about each of unity among Asian Indians in the U.S. Some letters emphasized the need for an umbrella organization to coordinate the working of regional, linguistic, and religious organizations.

Then there were letters which suggested that Asian Indians tend to be overly critical on India, its leaders, and social practices, its politics, in living conditions, its tourist facilities, and its facilities.

Some letters were critical about the materialistic orientations of Indians disorganized, Indian meetings, dishonest Indian businesses, and cheap Indian customers seeking illegal discounts. A number of letters emphasized the image building suggestions.

In this context, one letter writer was critical of Indian Ambassadors and consuls who tried to interfere with the working of Indian organizations in America. This letter writer referred to mismanagement of meetings held in connection with Mrs. Grandhi's visit to the USA in 1983.

Another letter was critical about the Asian Indian organization making financial gains from musical programs by eminent Indian artists. These were the manifest contents of these letters.

POLITICIZATION AND PARTICIPATION

In this category are included a number of letters with several sub-themes. A few emphasized the need for the involvement of Asian Indians in the American political processes. Some discussed the merits of 1984 Presidential candidates and the need for Asian Indians to evaluate the responsibilities of the candidates toward the issues affecting Asian Indians. Some had made specific references to the roles of Asian Indian organizations supporting Mr. Walter Mondale and a Philadelphia based political action committee opposing an American Senator for his anti-India orientations. The need for local level political involvement by Asian Indians was also discussed by a few letter writers in this category.

Some references were made to the need for political activity in opposition to immigration laws, unfair news reports about Indian businesses and such other issues. In particular, the letter writer suggested systematic protest against the family reunification section of the proposed 1984 immigration reform legislation. Other issues on which the letter writers suggested political activity included U.S. supply of equipment to Indian atomic reactor, bilateral trade, aid to India and demilitarization of the Indian Ocean. There were references to Asian Indian involvement in the election campaign of Governor Cuomo of New York, Brown in California, Tom Bradley in Los Angeles, Jan Bryne in Chicago, and Betty Lall in Manhattan.

Several letters dealt with the need to organize and provide financial references to the committee supporting Morarji Desai's law suit against Seymour Hersh. According to the letter writer charges against Desai was that a CIA agent, it represented insult to India and Indians.

AMERICANIZATION

The letters included under this category emphasized the integration with American society. A number of letters suggested the toning down of anti-American rhetoric by Asian Indian leaders. Such letters indicated the need for gratitude toward the nation that had adopted the Asian Indians and had given opportunities for education and professional practices. One letter writer went on to say that the Asian Indians have an obligation to America first and to India second. Another letter writer was critical of Indian newspapers in the United States for their primary concerns with problems and issues in India. He suggested that such news media should pay more attention to Indian community within America and its problems such as immigration, job discrimination, unemployment, religious fundamentalism, and cultural ties. Some of the letters included under this category had suggested the need for Asian Indians to adopt American social customs. Then were critical about Asian Indian social behavior.

CONCERNS FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The letters included in this category discussed special problems of Asian Indian women and children. Situations involving dowry, loveless marriages, mental health of Indian housewives in the U.S. were discussed. The problems of children and their need for mental health counselling were discussed. A number of women letter writers referred to "Bride Burning in the U.S.", "Immigration Dowry", and "Marriages of Convenience". An American wife of an Asian Indian wrote suggesting legal actions against Indians who abandon their American wives after getting permanent residence in the United States.

An Indian bride complained about how some Asian Indians marry Indian girls who are permanent residents or American citizens and are given green cards as dowries. But many of them divorce such girls within a short time.

Some letters dealt with specific ideas for Asian Indian youths including leadership training, summer programs, and youth involvement in constructive work.

DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

The letters included in this category discussed discrimination faced by Indian doctors and other job-seekers. One letter writer discussed the problems faced by the Indian doctors in obtaining residency. Suggestions were made about Indian organizations taking up these issues. Only five letters (3%) discussed this issue. The low frequency of letters included in this category was somewhat surprising.

SERVICE DELIVERY BY INDIAN ORGANIZATIONS

A large number of letters were included in this category. These letters discussed a wide range of problems involving service delivery. Indian community organizations were criticized for poor coordination, power-politics among officials, poor fund raising record and disorganized meetings. Indian Embassy staff were criticized for problems involving passports and visas.

Asian Indian newspapers were complimented for their role in fair reporting and raising voices against discriminatory practices. Such newspapers were also criticized for unfair reporting involving one or more communities.

A number of letters dealt with dishonest Indian traders selling defective blenders, heating pads, cassettes, and other goods to visitors from India at discount rates. A letter writer was critical about lack of hygienic condition in some Indian grocery stores selling food items.

A letter writer was critical about a committee of Asian Indians trying to vindicate the honor of an Indian politician. The writer felt that it was a wasted effort. Another Indian muslim letter writer complained about lack of information about muslim organizations and their activities in the Indian newspapers.

SUB-COMMUNITY PLURALISM

Letters included in this category dealt with diversities among the Asian Indian organization. Some emphasized the need for such diversities and sub-group identities. Some letter writers were not appreciative of such activities. Some members of specific Asian Indian sub-communities wrote about the need to maintain their identity. The other letter writers suggested the need for Asian Indian identity in the USA. In particular, there were some references to the Sikh people of Indian origin. The Sikh organizations were denounced for their apparent lack of nationalism. some Sikh letter writer emphasized the need for justice for Sikh people. There were references to the role of Asian Indian linguistic, religious and regional organization. Some appreciated their good work, the others condemned their parochial orientation.

MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES

A number of letters were included under this category and these had a wide range of subject. These included "Indian Boarding Schools in the U.S.", "Distortion of India's Image in Indiana Jones", "Flim Flam Indians", "Indians Making Collect Calls to Matrimonial Advertisers", "Indians Not Watching Satyajit Ray's Movies", "Promotion of Vegetarianism", and similar other concerns.

Table No. 2 specifically tabulates the thematic concerns of 8 anonymous letters that were published in the two newspapers. Their themes included Sikh movement, interference of Indian Embassy officials in Asian Indian organization, marriages of convenience by Asian Indian, Criticism of Indian Businesses in the U.S. , and a letter dealing with the critical attitudes of Asian Indian toward Indian.

Table No. 2
THEMATIC CONCERN
OF
ANONYMOUS LETTERS

Themes	Frequency	Percentages
Sikh Movement	2	25%
Interference of Indian Embassy officials in Asian Indian organizations	1	12%
Marriage of convenience by Asian Indians	3	37%
Asian Indians overly critical of India	1	12%
Criticism of Indian Business in USA	1	12%
Total	8	98%

Table No. 3 provides some background information about the letter writers. A great majority of the letter writers were male (N=115) and 9 were females. As many as 8 persons had requested withholding the publication of their names in the paper. Fourteen letter writers indicated their affiliation as office-holders in Asian Indian organizations. These included two major national associations of Asian Indian.

Table No. 3

PROFILE OF THE
LETTER WRITERS
N = 132

<u>Gender</u>			<u>Organizational Affiliation</u>		
Male	- 115	87%	Individuals - 110	- 110	83%
Female	- 9	6%	Individuals with organizational	- 14	10%
Anonymous	- 8	6%	Anonymous	- 8	6%
Total	132	99%	Total	132	99%
<u>Organization officials among letter writers</u>					
National Association of American of Asian Indian Descent					1
Sikh Temple/Sikh Heritage Institute					2
Academic organization (university)					4
Association of Indians in America					1
Indians Abroad for Truth					1
Government organization					1
Association of Indian Students in America					1
Hindu Temple Society of America					1
Gujrati Samaj Inc					1
Ram Kabin Bhakta Samaj					1
Total					14

III

CONCLUSIONS

This working paper has attempted to utilize an unobtrusive data source to analyze the priority of letter writers to Asian Indian English newspapers in the U.S. The letters to the editor published in two weekly Asian Indian newspapers were content analyzed to identify their thematic concerns. A content analysis of 132 such letters published between September 1983 to June 1984 was made. Such analysis suggests the feasibility of carrying out comprehensive content analysis research on Asian Indian with content analysis technique.

The Asian Indian newspaper in the USA published a number of specific items that may be content analyzed to identify the issue priorities in the Asian communities. Other documentary data sources are also available for such analysis. These may include mimeographed newsletters, proceedings of Asian Indian conferences, publication by Asian Indian organizations, and such other documents. This suggests the need for a comprehensive research design to analyze their communication contents.

There are reasons to believe that several Asian Indian newspapers exist outside New York and the West Coast. Thematic contents of the letter to the editor published in this paper may provide a rich data source for comparative analyses.¹⁰

REFERENCES

1. An introduction to content analysis as a methodology may be found in KLAUS KRIPPENDORF, Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980).

2. See Earl Babbie, The Practice of Social Research (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1983) pp 272-303. For examples of content analysis research see the following:

G. Ray Funkhouser, "The Issues of the Sixties: An Exploratory Study", Public Opinion Quarterly, Spring 1973, pp 52-75, and Jack Levin and James Spate, "Hippie Values: An Analysis of the Underground Press" Youth and Society, January-March, 1970, pp 59-72.

3. A survey research and content analysis of the issues in the Sixties showed close correspondence between the two results. See Funkhouser (1973) *ibid*.

4. There are non-English newspapers, magazines, and newsletters published in the Asian Indian communities. But there are reasons to believe that the English language newspapers have a wider circulation among the Asian Indians. India Abroad claims a circulation of around 30 thousand copies.

5. A short bibliography of Studies on overseas Indian communities may be seen in Manindra K. Mohapatra, Overseas Indians as Ethnic Minorities: A Select Bibliography (Monticello: Vance, 1979). some current research on Asian Indians include the following:

BRIJ B. KHARE, "Cultural Identity and Problems of Acclimatization: Three Areas of Concern", in Yung-Hwan Jo (Ed), Political Participation of Asian Americans. The Pacific/Asian American Mental Health Research Center Occasional Paper Series No. 6 1980, pp 59-72; PARAMATMA SARAN and EDWIN EAMES (Eds) The New Ethnics: Asian Indians in the United States, and Manindra K. Mohapatra A Study of the Affluent Overseas Indians in the United States (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1984) (forthcoming).

5. References to scholarly works on pre-1965 Asian Indian immigrants may be seen in Bruce La Brack, "The East Indian Experience" An unpublished annotated bibliography.

7. A sampling of such documents may be in the appendix.

8. See Appendix for a sampling of these letters.

9. See Earl Babbie (1983) pp 278-279.

10. The following studies may provide a comparative perspective for researchers interested in content analytic work involving newspapers.

C.A. Oliphant, "The Image of the United States Projected by Peking Reviews". Journalism Quarterly 41, 1964 pp416-420.

F.T. Marquez, "How Accurate are the Headlines?" Journal of Communications Summer 1980 pp 30-36.

Andy McCue, "Evolving Chinese Language Dailies Serve Immigrants in New York City" Journalism Quarterly 1980 pp 272-276.

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Robert E. Park The Immigrant Press and Its Contents (New York: Harper, 1922).

